

stem perches before another foray above the fire.

Ali and Ripley (1968-1974), mention this behaviour in their account of Black Drongo feeding habits. However, on 31st January we observed 4 Ashy Drongos (*Dicrurus leucophaeus*), and 30+ Ashy Wood-Swallows (*Artamus fuscus*), feeding in a similar manner with c. 50 Black Drongos. The Wood-Swallows usually fed at a greater height than

the Drongos, and were never seen to land. In addition, 3 Black-shouldered Kites (*Elanus caeruleus*), fed low over the same area, also in close association with the fire-front, and were thought to be looking for fleeing small terrestrial prey.

In view of the large number of insects driven out of such an area it is perhaps surprising that no more species were seen capitalizing on this rich food supply.

CALF OF MAN BIRD OBSERVATORY,
ISLE OF MAN, U.K.

ADRIAN DEL-NEVO

EDWARD GREY INSTITUTE OF FIELD
ORNITHOLOGY, DEPT. OF ZOOLOGY,
SOUTH PARKS RD., OXFORD., U.K.,
April 14, 1982.

PETER J. EWINS

REFERENCE

ALI, S. & RIPLEY, S. D. (1968-1974): Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan. 10 Vols. Oxford University Press. Bombay.

7. OCCURRENCE OF THE GREAT CRESTED GREBE, *PODICEPS CRISTATUS* (LINNE) AT RANCHI, BIHAR

In November last Mrs. Marie Palit who lives at Ranchi, Bihar, wrote to me about some water birds which had over the last few years started visiting the water-supply lakes nearby. They occurred in large numbers over 300 at a time. Mrs. Palit said that they resembled a large grebe a picture of which she sent me from an American magazine and I suggested that it may be the Great Crested Grebe, *Podiceps cristatus* (Linné) of which the nearest record appeared to be one(?) seen by Mr. Horace Alexander (INDIAN HANDBOOK 1 p. 3) at Puri, Orissa.

In the meantime, my wife visited Ranchi and Mrs. Palit took her down to one of the lakes and they saw 40-50 birds in the distance.

The lake was clear of weeds. Later Mrs. Palit sent in pieces of two specimens which are no doubt of this species. I wrote to Mr. Alexander for more information but though he remembered that he saw it in December 1946 in Orissa he did not recollect whether this was on salt or fresh water but the fact that he wrote to Sálím Ali must mean, he said, that it was a relatively exciting record. He wrote again saying he had found his notebook which referred to 40-50 birds at Puri Lake on 25 December 1946 and again an uncounted number seen on 1st January 1947.

This species is accepted as a winter visitor entering from the north-west, extending as far south as Gujarat in the west and eastwards

along the north into Assam and Manipur. On the eastern side the southernmost record is the one from Puri referred to above while Inglis quotes a few records from much further north in the Madhubani Sub-Division of Darbhanga District in Tirhut (JBNHS 16 p. 342). The present records are from over 200 miles southwards, but Mrs. Palit was informed that they have been seen here over the last few years only. They are locally known as Siberian duck and often caught at night in

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March 25, 1982.

nets laid for fish.

In her last letter Mrs. Palit said one was obtained on 13th March, "when only about 100 birds were left, and all had gone by 20th March".

In the absence of earlier records it would appear that they have started visiting this area in fairly recent years and it would be interesting to try and determine to what factor this change in migratory limits further southwards can be attributed.

HUMAYUN ABDULALI

8. WINTER FOOD OF SPOTTED OWLET, *ATHENE BRAMA INDICA*

A group of six Spotted owlets, *Athene brama indica* which roosted on a *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* very close to our laboratory, were regularly observed to study their social behaviour. We also analysed their faecal pellets during winter to study their food. The identifiable contents were sorted from the faecal pellets and analysed by gravimetric method (Table 1) following Southern (1969).

It is observed that during the month of December about 60 per cent of their food was composed of various types of insects but during January their food consisted pre-dominantly of rodents (60.2%). The mandibles which were found intact in the faecal pellets were identified to be mostly of the Field mouse, *Mus* sp. *Eucalyptus* seeds, small pebbles and lime particles also occurred in the faecal pellets. Apparently they are taken for assisting in the grinding of food.

In the Central Research Farm of the Institute (about 400 hectares) the rodent population is constituted mostly by *Tatera indica* (43.8%), *Meriones hurrianae* (28.9%), *Ger-*

billus nanus indus (24.0%) but other rodents also occur in low numbers: *G. gladowi*

TABLE 1
PER CENT OCCURRENCE OF VARIOUS UNDIGESTED ITEMS
IN THE FAECAL PELLETS OF *Athene brama indica*

Items	1st week of December	Last week of January	Ave. winter food
INSECTS	59.79	34.15	46.7
Hemiptera	4.68	2.43	3.5
Hymenoptera	0.85	1.62	1.2
Coleoptera			
Carabidae	1.71	3.25	2.5
Scarabaeidae	23.50	0.81	12.0
Tenebrionidae	18.80	14.63	16.7
Misc. unid. insects	10.25	11.41	10.8
RODENTS	28.19	60.22	44.2
Jaws, bones of			
Rodents	9.40	18.76	14.1
Fur	0.85	0.81	0.8
Semi-digested material	17.94	40.65	29.3
PLANT MATTER			
<i>Eucalyptus</i> seeds	1.28	0.81	1.0
PEBBLES	11.96	4.06	8.0